

Brendan Gleeson Finds Caustic Charm of ‘The Guard’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on August 5, 2011 - 9:29am

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Rating: **4.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – Brendan Gleeson pushes forward John Michael McDonagh’s strong “The Guard” through the sheer power of his incredible personality. The lovable-but-irascible actor delivers one of the most enjoyable performances of the year and he’s amply assisted by the great Don Cheadle and a clever, unapologetic script from his writer, making a strong directorial debut. There’s an awful comedy opening at the multiplex this weekend (“[The Change-Up](#) [16]”). Seek out the vastly superior one if you’re in a major city.

“The Guard” opens with a punch to the face as a car goes speeding through the hills of Ireland and N.E.R.D. raps “*f**king poser*” from their great song “Rock Star.” Moments later, Sergeant Gerry Boyle (Gleeson) comes upon the inevitable car accident and doesn’t even pull the bodies from the car before checking the pockets of the likely-deceased, finding some acid, and taking it as he stares out at the water. In another movie, this scene might play like something out of “Bad Lieutenant: Dublin,” but McDonagh’s film is nowhere near that dark or violent. It’s just a prologue designed to keep the audience on their toes – this is something different, not your typical buddy comedy.



The Guard

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

Boyle and his new partner Aidan (Rory Keenan) soon stumble upon a brutal murder scene, not a commonality in their sleepy Irish burg. It's not long before Aidan is missing and Boyle has discovered an impending major drug deal involving a trio of true maniacs (Liam Cunningham, Mark Strong, David Wilmot). The deal is so major that the F.B.I. has tracked it across the pond and sent Agent Wendell Everett (Don Cheadle). Virtually on their own (as Irish cops are apparently very easy to bribe), Everett and Boyle become an odd dynamic duo.

The overarching plot of "The Guard" isn't nearly as important as the details. This is not a movie with notable twists and turns like your average American buddy cop thriller (there's very little in the way of actual suspense until the very end), and so the joy is in the way it unfolds more than in traditional action movie clichés. Boyle may be an obnoxious jerk who does drugs and sleeps with whores but he's also portrayed as the only pure man left in his half of Ireland. He speaks and often acts before he thinks but he often has the best of intentions (even if those intentions are often to satisfy his own needs). And when he's partnered with the more-traditional Everett, what could have been a clichéd oil-and-water buddy movie in a lesser writer's hands feels organic and genuine.

The script is strong but the main reason that "The Guard" avoids cliché is that McDonagh was lucky enough to attach two of the best working actors to his project. Yes, he consciously avoids the traps of his buddy genre in his writing but Cheadle and Gleeson have a way of making anything feel fresh and real. There are elements of McDonagh's script that are relatively routine but Cheadle and especially Gleeson make even them feel new. They're both fantastic here.



The Guard

Photo credit: Sony Pictures Classics

Most of the credit for the success of "The Guard" can fall at the feet of the great Brendan Gleeson but the behind-the-scenes players also deserve praise for a buddy comedy that feels injected with energy from the aforementioned opening sequence to the climactic shoot-out. This is a vibrant, lively movie and it's almost a movie miracle to see how McDonagh ignores the typical genre beats and brings to life to scenes that other writers would have completely ignored (like the ones between Gleeson and the great Fionnula Flanagan as his mother). The piece is expertly edited and paced and a Calexico score that nods to the great Ennio Morricone helps the overall tone.

In a summer season overcrowded with superheroes, Sergeant Boyle is a refreshing antidote. He may not be perfect (and he long ago gave up on really trying to be) but he's fascinating and hysterical. Most of all, he's one of the most memorable characters of the entire summer.

"The Guard" stars Brendan Gleeson, Don Cheadle, Liam Cunningham, David Wilmot, Rory Keenan, Mark Strong, and Fionnula Flanagan. It was written and directed by John Michael McDonagh. The film is rated R and opens in Chicago on August 5th, 2011.



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